



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 27, 2020

Ms. Amber K. King  
General Counsel  
Lake Travis Independent School District  
3322 Ranch Road 620 South  
Austin, Texas 78738

OR2020-26953

Dear Ms. King:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 850566.

The Lake Travis Independent School District (the "district") received two requests from the same requestor for: 1) agreements, contracts, and invoices related to a specified law firm during a specified period; and 2) information related to the employment of a named individual.<sup>1</sup> You state the district has redacted student-identifying information from the submitted documents pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code.<sup>2</sup> We understand the district is withholding certain information subject to section 552.117 of the Government Code as

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<sup>1</sup> The district states it sought and received clarification of the information requested with regard to the first request for information. See Gov't Code § 552.222 (providing if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify request); see also *City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S.W.3d 380, 387 (Tex. 2010) (holding that when a governmental entity, acting in good faith, requests clarification or narrowing of an unclear or overbroad request for information, the ten-day period to request an attorney general ruling is measured from the date the request is clarified or narrowed).

<sup>2</sup> The United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office (the "DOE") has informed this office FERPA does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental or student consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act. The DOE has determined FERPA determinations must be made by the educational authority in possession of the education records. A copy of this letter may be found on the Office of the Attorney General's website: <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/open-government/20060725-USDOE-FERPA.pdf>

permitted by section 552.024(c) of the Government Code.<sup>3</sup> The district claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, and 552.103 of the Government Code and privileged under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. Additionally, the district states it notified an individual of the request for information and of their right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information at issue should not be released.<sup>4</sup> *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released). We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, as the district acknowledges, some of the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022 provides, in relevant part, the following:

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

...

(3) information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body; [and]

...

(16) information that is in a bill for attorney's fees and that is not privileged under the attorney-client privilege[.]

*Id.* § 552.022(a)(3), (16). The submitted information includes information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of funds by a governmental body that is subject to section 552.022(a)(3) and attorney fee bills subject to section 552.022(a)(16). The district must release this information pursuant to sections 552.022(a)(3) and 552.022(a)(16), unless it is made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* The district seeks to withhold the information subject to section 552.022, which we have indicated, under section 552.103 of the Government Code. However, section 552.103 is discretionary in nature and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See*

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<sup>3</sup> Section 552.117 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the home addresses and telephone numbers, emergency contact information, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body. *See* Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Section 552.024 of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to withhold information subject to section 552.117 without requesting a decision from this office if the current or former employee or official chooses not to allow public access to the information. *See id.* § 552.024(c).

<sup>4</sup> As of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from the notified party explaining why the information at issue should not be released.

*Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103); Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the information at issue under section 552.103. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure and the Texas Rules of Evidence are “other law” that make information expressly confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Therefore, we will consider the district’s assertion of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 for the information at issue. Further, we will consider the district’s argument under section 552.103 for the information not subject to section 552.022.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503(b)(1) provides as follows:

A client has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services to the client:

- (A) between the client or the client’s representative and the client’s lawyer or the lawyer’s representative;
- (B) between the client’s lawyer and the lawyer’s representative;
- (C) by the client, the client’s representative, the client’s lawyer, or the lawyer’s representative to a lawyer representing another party in a pending action or that lawyer’s representative, if the communications concern a matter of common interest in the pending action;
- (D) between the client’s representatives or between the client and the client’s representative; or
- (E) among lawyers and their representatives representing the same client.

TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). A communication is “confidential” if it is not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication. *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Thus, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must: (1) show the document is a communication transmitted between privileged parties or reveals a confidential communication; (2) identify the parties involved in the communication; and (3) show the communication is confidential by explaining it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and it was made in

furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 (2002). Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the entire communication is confidential under rule 503 provided the client has not waived the privilege or the communication does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 503(d). *See Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, orig. proceeding). We note communications with third parties with whom a governmental entity shares a privity of interest are protected. Open Records Decision Nos. 464 (1987), 429 (1985).

The district asserts the information it marked and indicated should be withheld under rule 503. The district states the information at issue consists of privileged attorney-client communications between the district's attorneys, district representatives, and district officials and staff in their capacities as clients. The district also states the communications at issue were made for the purpose of the rendition of legal services to the district. The district indicates the communications at issue have not been, and were not intended to be, disclosed to third parties. Based on the district's representations and our review, we find the district established some of the information at issue constitutes attorney-client communications under rule 503. Accordingly, the district may withhold the information we marked pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. However, we find the district has failed to demonstrate the remaining information it marked consists of privileged attorney-client communications. We note an entry stating a memorandum or an e-mail was prepared or drafted does not demonstrate the document was communicated to the client. Thus, we find the district has not demonstrated the remaining information at issue was communicated and it does not reveal a client confidence. Accordingly, the district may not withhold any portion of the remaining information at issue under rule 503. The district must release the remaining information.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides, in part:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.103 has the burden of providing relevant facts and documentation

sufficient to establish the applicability of this exception to the information that it seeks to withhold. To meet this burden, the governmental body must demonstrate that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body receives the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to the pending or anticipated litigation. *See Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a). *See* ORD 551 at 4.

You argue the remaining information at issue is related to pending litigation against the district. You state the district is currently involved in a special education due process hearing. You inform us, and provide documentation showing, this special education due process hearing was filed with the Texas Education Agency prior to the district's receipt of the instant requests for information. We note such special education due process hearings are governed by the Administrative Procedures Act (the "APA"). *See* 19 T.A.C. § 249.4(a)(1); Open Records Decision No. 588 (1991) (contested case under APA constitutes litigation for purposes of statutory predecessor to section 552.103). Thus, we determine the district was involved in pending litigation at the time it received the instant request. You state the information at issue directly relates to the subject of this pending litigation. Based on your representations and our review, we find the information at issue is related to the pending litigation. Therefore, we conclude the district may withhold Exhibit G under section 552.103 of the Government Code.<sup>5</sup>

Generally, however, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation though discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to all parties to the pending litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a) and must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

In summary, the district may withhold the information we marked pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. The district may withhold Exhibit G under section 552.103 of the Government Code. The district must release the remaining information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

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<sup>5</sup> As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

Sean McCormick  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

SMC/gw

Ref: ID# 850566

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

c: Third Party  
(w/o enclosures)